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### Does intra-party democracy affect levels of trust in parties?

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# Does intraparty democracy affect levels of trust in parties? The cases of Belgium and Israel

Accepted version

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## Abstract

Previous research has shown a steady decline of citizen's political trust and growing skepticism towards key institutions of representative democracy. Political parties, which perform the crucial role of linking citizens to the political system, are in the eye of the storm: citizens are generally more distrusting towards parties than other social and political institutions. The relevant literature mentions that parties often implement intraparty democratization to remedy party distrust. This article examines whether democratic candidate selection processes actually affect party trust among voters. The analysis is based on the cases of Belgium and Israel, where politicians made a strong case for intraparty democracy in recent history. The results indicate that, while inclusive selectorates indeed increase trust levels, decentralization decreases trust towards parties in both countries.

**Key words:** Candidate selection, trust in parties, Belgium, Israel

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The literature on democratic political attitudes is vast. Scholars have examined how country-level determinants, such as economic conditions, cultural features and institutional structures shape citizen's satisfaction with democracy, levels of external and internal efficacy, social capital and political trust. They also test how individual level characteristics, such as gender, race, or sophistication levels affect citizens' political attitudes. This article extends the current research and examines the effect of intraparty democracy—a party level characteristic—on the trust levels in political parties. Political trust is a crucial attitude for citizens in representative democracies, as it is often considered as diffuse political support, which enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic government (Easton, 1965; Mishler and Rose, 2005). Trust in democratic institutions "reflects evaluations of whether or not political authorities and institutions are performing in accordance with the normative expectations held by the public" (Miller and Listhaug, 1990, p. 358). In this paper we adopt an institutional perspective on trust (as opposed to a cultural view) and assert, similar to Mishler and Rose (2001) that institutional trust centers on citizens' evaluation of institutions' performance.

An extensive body of literature shows a steady decline of citizens' trust over the last decades in various democratic institutions such as government, parliament and parties (Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Klingemann, 1999; Norris, 1999). Indeed, the severe decrease of trust in political parties is part of a general skepticism and public disenchantment towards key institutions of representative democracy (Dalton and Weldon, 2005). The decline of trust in parties was also attributed to the weak linkage between voters and their representatives, which used to be mediated by parties (Norris, 1999; Dalton, 1999).

Early authors established the common wisdom that political parties are the inevitable basis of democracy (Duverger, 1952). Although this consensus has not been called into question by more recent scholars, it seems that parties are one of the least trusted institutions: compared to other social and political institutions, citizens are even more distrusting towards parties as they receive extremely poor ratings in the majority of international public opinion surveys (e.g. ESS, WVS, EVS). Apart from declining party support, the drop in party membership figures and campaign participation rates all point to a general erosion of partisan attachment in advanced industrial democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000).

Parties have experimented with several remedies to overcome the reported partisan decline (Van Biezen *et al*, 2012). One of the strategies is to democratize intraparty decision-making procedures to mobilize members and citizens into the democratic process (Scarrow *et al*, 2000; Cross and Pilet, 2014). **It is often argued that party actors act to bring about the institutional rules (in this case, intra-party candidate selection procedures) that they expect to result in the most desirable outcome (Bawn, 1993). Candidate lists and selection procedures could be considered the outcome of intraparty struggles taking place between intraparty factions. Of course, the extent of strategic behavior among intraparty factions varies with the constraining effects of the electoral system and existing laws on the recruitment of political elites (Boix, 1999). However, the reported partisan decline functions as an external shock (Harmel and Janda, 1994) which urges parties to change (i.e. democratize) their intraparty rules. With these reforms, party elites hope to improve positive attitudes towards political parties. In this context, this paper also contributes to the theoretical discussion on the determinants and consequences of institutional change, as we examine whether intraparty democracy, measured by the inclusiveness of the selectorate and decentralization of the candidate selection process, positively affects levels of trust in parties. The empirical analysis is based on the cases of Belgium and Israel, where politicians**

and public opinion-makers made a strong case for intraparty democracy. We find support for the hypothesis that inclusive selectorates increase levels of trust in parties. Decentralization, on the contrary, tends to decrease trust levels in both countries.

**Thus, this study shows that, even in an era of partisan dealignment, the characteristics of party organizations have far-reaching consequences for the functioning of representative democracies: intra-party decision-making procedures affect citizens' attitudes toward parties as institutions in particular, and toward representative democracy in general.**

### **Determinants of trust in parties: what about party level-predictors?**

A significant segment of the literature has focused on identifying the determinants of political trust among citizens. Scholars have found several common individual-level and contextual macro-level variables to significantly affect citizens' trust in democratic institutions in general and political parties in particular.

At the individual-level demographic variables, subjective well-being, external efficacy, support for coalition parties, and toleration of corruption have robust significant effects on political trust (Catterberg and Moreno, 2005). Slomczynski and Janicka (2009) show that individuals' social stratification positions impact pro-democratic attitudes such as trust in democratic institutions, but the effect is mediated by the countries' level of economic development. Mishler and Rose (2001) conclude that individual evaluations of political and economic performance are substantially more important than socialization experience.

Nonetheless, research found that socialization and demographic variables such as age, education, gender and church attendance often have significant, but rather weak effects in these statistical models. So although some political socialization effects might occur as well (see, for instance: Inglehart, 1997), empirical findings mainly support the institutional performance

model, which states that political trust is determined by the evaluation of performance by the institutions under consideration (Newton and Norris, 2000). This implies that political trust is politically endogenous: institutions are able to generate trust if they perform well.

In addition to the institutional performance predictors, the effects of contextual determinants, such as the age of the democracy, its electoral system and its economic condition on political trust were analyzed (Miller and Listhaug, 1990; van der Meer, 2010). Van der Meer and Dekker (2011) hypothesize that country level characteristics such as corruption, economic development and electoral system affect trust levels, but the effects are mediated by citizens' evaluations of politics. Their model only supports the hypothesis that corruption levels negatively affect political trust, and that this macro effect is explained by micro-evaluations of competence and reliability (Van der Meer and Dekker, 2011).

The empirical support for the institutional performance theory implies that even for political parties, one of the most distrusted democratic institution in public opinion surveys, not all is lost. As mentioned, political parties try to remedy party decline through democratizing their decision-making procedures. In this manner, democratizing parties fulfill one of their vital functions in representative democracies: mobilizing people to participate in the electoral process, or in this case to become more involved in intraparty politics (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000).

This suggests that intraparty democracy would generate more trust among voters: democratizing parties more strongly correspond to the expected role of parties linking citizens to the electoral process, and thus perform better than undemocratically organized political parties. Hence, citizens supporting democratically organized parties should exhibit substantially higher trust levels than citizens which support undemocratically organized parties. **Yet, to date**

**only few scholars have attempted to examine the effects of intraparty reforms on levels of trust in parties (van Haute and Gauja, 2015; Bernardi, Sandri and Seddone, 2016).**

It has been argued that the spreading distrust of political parties probably increases pressures for institutional changes that alter the role of parties in the democratic process (Cain *et al*, 2003). Dalton (2004) examined whether such electoral reforms in Japan and New Zealand restored public confidence in parties. The data did not support this argument, and it was concluded that as distrust in parties extends across all types of electoral systems and party configurations, institutional reforms will not suffice to solve this problem. We argue that the absence of a significant effect here was because Dalton examined the effect of a general electoral reform on party support. We, on the other hand, propose to study the effects of specific intraparty reforms on the level of trust in parties. In other words, we link the democratic nature of party organizations to the level of trust towards this particular democratic institution. **Thus, since only rarely do scholars study the way parties shape citizens' opinion about democracy, the paper's main contribution is to direct scholarly attention to the way parties—a meso level characteristic—shape trust in parties.**

### **The effect of candidate selection processes on trust in parties**

We look at the nature of parties' candidate selection processes and examine whether and how it affects citizens' trust in parties. In the last few decades, we have witnessed an ever growing interest of political scientists in candidate selection procedures. Whether focusing on selection processes' determinants (Lundell, 2004; Pennings and Hazan, 2001; Shomer, 2014) or on selection processes' effects on various political phenomena (De-Luca *et al*, 2002; Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Shomer, 2009; Sieberer, 2006), scholars mainly failed to address whether and how candidate selections affect citizen's political attitudes. We argue that the way parties select their lists—its degree of inclusiveness and centralization—should affect citizens' evaluation of

parties themselves, and therefore, as argued by the institutional performance model, their levels of trust in them.

### **Defining the selectorate and decentralization dimensions**

In this paper we regard two central dimensions the literature identifies as cardinal for the study of selection processes: selectorate and level of centralization. We hypothesize that each dimension affects citizens' trust in parties differently. The first dimension—the selectorate—is the group that selects the candidates and determines who is eligible to represent the party on election-day. Similar to Rahat and Hazan (2001), we conceive the selectorate dimension to range from an exclusive pole, whereby one party leader selects to an inclusive selectorate, in which the entire electorate takes part in a party's selection process. The second dimension—level of centralization—measures the territorial and sectorial level at which the selection takes place. We focus on territorial centralization, which categorizes whether selection is done exclusively at a national level, or whether it ensures regional and/or local participation as well (Hazan, 2002).

**How, then, does the scope of the selectorate and the selection's centralization level affect citizens' trust in parties? Most current literature does not address this question directly (but see: Sandri and Amjahad, 2015 and Bernardi *et al*, 2016). *While hardly testing directly the effect of selection on trust levels, the literature does examine other political consequences of selections, findings that the answer to the question whether democratized selection are beneficial (Cross, 1996) or disadvantageous (Kernell, 2013) depends about the political phenomena examined and the data used. For example, with regards to citizens' opinions, it has been argued that decentralized inclusive selectorates increase***



**participation levels (Shapira *et al*, 2010), enhance citizens' satisfaction with democracy (Shomer *et al*, 2016) and boost legitimacy. On the other hand, some scholars claimed that democratic and decentralized selection processes bring intra-party disagreements to the forefront, consequently leading to greater distrust (Kernell, 2013; Greene and Haber, 2015). Our paper contributes to the existing literature on intra-party selection processes by trying to empirically resolve this controversy in the literature.**

Given the controversy in the literature, we contend that democratic selectorates might either increase or decrease citizens' trust in parties, while decentralized procedures decrease it. We present two mechanisms through which larger selectorates affect citizens' trust in parties, whereby the first—procedural fairness—enhances trust levels, and the second—intraparty conflict—decreases them. We also present one mechanism, which relates selections' centralization levels to trust in parties: intra-party conflict, while differentiating pre-electoral from post-electoral periods.

The first mechanism through which larger selectorates affect trust in parties relates to procedural fairness. Literature on job applicants' perceptions of selection procedures repeatedly emphasizes the importance of fairness perception of the selection procedure itself (Gilliland, 1993; Ryan and Ployhart, 2000). Indeed Gilliland (1993) maintained that selection information—information provided in advance about the scoring system—affects the perceived overall fairness of the selection. In political science it has been argued that procedural fairness positively affect citizens' attitudes towards the government (Miller and Listhaug, 1999). We contend, by the same token, that procedural fairness should derive partisan trust upwards. As a larger segment of the electorate is entitled to participate in the selection process, it appears to be procedurally fair. No longer do voters perceive the selection procedure to take place at a back room, where party leaders compose the party's list at the expense of voters' interest (DeLuca *et al*, 2002). The inclusive process is more informative and is, therefore, perceived to be

open, transparent and fair: it allows ordinary citizens to directly participate and affect the outcome. Indeed, this was the reason some parties opted to democratize their selection processes from the get-go (Cross, 1996; Scarrow, 1999).

The second mechanism we present—intra party conflict—explains a negative effect of inclusive selectorate on trust in parties. Democratic selection processes also intensify and highlight intra-party conflict. As opposed to selection via party leadership, which encourages candidates to be loyal to the leadership, selection via democratic processes incentivizes candidates to compete for the support of a large selectorate. Hence, candidates are incentivized to distinguish themselves from their co-partisan candidates (Norris, 2004). Kernel (2013) finds that voters are less likely to vote for parties that allow voters, rather than party leaders, to select their candidates. She ascribes these findings to the notion that as a greater segment of the citizenry is involved in selection processes they become more aware to intra-party conflicts and factionalization, and lose support in those parties. Similarly, Greene and Haber (2015) argue that democratic selectorates enhance public's awareness of intra-party disagreements, which in turn negatively affect citizens' evaluations of parties and their tendency to vote for them.

Given the two contradictory plausible projections about selectorate's effect on trust in parties mentioned above, we hypothesize them both, and allow the data to empirically determine how selectorate affect trust levels, and which mechanism is at play: procedural fairness or intra-party conflict. We hypothesize that:

H1a. Inclusive candidate selection methods are associated with higher levels of trust in parties.

H1b. Inclusive candidate selection methods are associated with lower levels of trust in parties<sup>1</sup>.

Intra-party conflict is also the mechanism that relates selection's centralization levels to citizens' trust in parties. Decentralized selection processes may bring to the political forefront intra-party divisions between the party's local and national levels. For example, it has been argued that

there exists a tradeoff between territorial and the nationally desired social decentralization: when selections are conducted at the local level it is harder to optimize social representation, for instance, female representation (Matland and Studlar, 1996). Indeed, in the Belgian case, research shows that decentralized selections do lead to more balanced territorial representation, but the latter comes at the expense of female representation (Put, 2015).

Decentralized selections also strengthen intra-party divisions in the post-election period. It has been argued that parties, which employ centralized selection processes behave in a unified manner, as the party's representatives tend to toe the party line (Hix, 2002; Sieberer, 2006), whereas decentralization stimulates conflict since parliament members, who owe their selection to a local group, might defy the national party line and represent their selections' constituents (Benedetto and Hix, 2007).

These intraparty divisions, whether during the selection stage or in the post-election period, might give parties a bad image and cause party supporters to be disgusted by the offensive competitive political process. Consequently, they may lose trust in political parties themselves. We therefore hypothesize that:

H2. Decentralized candidate selections are associated with lower levels of trust in parties.

## **Data and method**

We use data from Belgium and Israel to empirically test how levels of centralization and the scope of the selectorate affect citizens' trust in political parties. **Both countries constitute a most similar research design:** both use a proportional electoral system to elect their parliament, which coupled with the countries' social cleavages yield a multiparty legislature. Moreover, in both countries various parties employ divergent mechanisms to select their lists

enabling variation on both the selectorate dimension, as well as the level of centralization. We take advantage of this within country cross-party variation in selection processes to examine how they affect citizens' trust in parties. By analyzing each country separately we hold constant various macro-level determinants that were hypothesized to affect trust levels, for example a country's electoral system. In addition to the variation in selection methods in both Israel and Belgium politicians and parties themselves publically argue in favor of democratizing selection processes, citing legitimacy crisis and increasing citizenry trust as crucial reasons. For example, Israeli Knesset Member Ben-Ari said on June 2011 that "only primaries will restore public's trust" (Channel 7, 2011). In Belgium, especially during the 1990s several parties have democratized their internal decision-making procedures with the explicit goal of decreasing citizens' distrust towards political institutions (Devos and Verstraeten, 2002).

**We use both Belgium and Israel to increase external validity and verify that the results from one country are not unique. For that reason, while we do not compare directly Israel and Belgium we chose two countries with a similar system: both use PR electoral system in a context of a highly fractionalized party system (most similar research design). While other cases that satisfy these conditions might have been considered, we could not locate public opinion data for them that examine citizens' trust in parties. Therefore, we limit our analysis to Israel and Belgium only. It is important to mention, nonetheless, that the similarity across our cases also hinder generalizability: the extent to which our results are specific to PR countries with a fractionalized party system needs to be tested in future research, by including more countries from divergent settings.**

For Belgium we examine five consecutive legislative sessions from 1995 until 2014, and in Israel we examine three consecutive legislative terms from 2003 until 2013.<sup>2</sup> We use individual-level data to measure respondent's trust levels and other independent variables, and utilize a two-level hierarchical linear model, whereby individuals constitute the first level, and parties

within a given legislative session constitute the second level. We nest individuals within parties (in a given legislative session) using their answer to a vote question. In the Israeli case we use the Israeli Democratic Institute's Democracy Index, and utilize the question: "If the elections were held today, which party would you vote for?" to connect respondents to parties<sup>3</sup>. In Belgium we use the Belgium General Election Studies for the 1995, 1999 and 2003 elections, and the European Social Survey for the 2007 and 2010 elections<sup>4</sup>. In both studies, the respondents were asked to answer the question: "What party did you vote for in the last national election?". These survey items allow us to nest respondents in political parties and link their levels of trust with intraparty candidate selection dimensions. Data on parties' selection processes was collected by the authors.

## **Variable operationalization**

The outcome variable is a categorical variable which measures citizens' trust levels towards political parties.<sup>5</sup> Note that the question wording and the number of categories in the trust questions' answer differ between Israel and Belgium. While in Israel respondents were presented with four possible answers, in Belgium they were presented with five.<sup>6</sup> Since we do not pool the two cases together these wording differences neither pose a serious challenge for the analysis nor do they constitute a validity concern.

The main predictors of this research refer to candidate selection processes' selectorate scope and their levels of centralization. We operationalize the selectorate using three categories, whereby 0 represents selection via a small group of party leaders, 1 represents selection via party delegates, and 2 selection via primaries (O'Brien and Shomer, 2013). Centralization is also a three-category variable, whereby 0 was assigned to parties that use solely nationalized procedures, 1 represent parties whose selections involved both the national as well as the local level, and 2 was assigned to parties with exclusively localized procedures (Tavits, 2012). For

each country we present two models, whereby the first treats each of the three-category variables as an index, and the second validates the index by treating each variable as a categorical indicator, and using treatment contrasts. We use selection via party leaders as a reference group in the selectorate treatment contrast, and selection solely at the national level as the reference group for centralization<sup>7</sup>.

At the party level, we control for two additional variables. First, a dummy variable indicating whether the party which the respondent voted for is a coalition (1) or an opposition party (0). Norris (1999) finds that people who support governmental parties have higher levels of institutional trust. Second, we control for the party's ideology, whereby -1 represents right parties, 0 center parties and +1 left parties.

The literature review demonstrated how demographic predictors have modest effects on political trust, while emphasizing that performance evaluations are more consequential. Nonetheless, we control for respondents' education levels; income levels (Slomczynski and Janicka, 2009); age (while also squaring it to allow for curvilinear relationships); and gender. Data availability concerns prohibit us from including direct measures of economic and political performance. To overcome this drawback we use a proxy: satisfaction with democracy, which has often been regarded as a performance measure (Huang *et al.*, 2008; Linde and Ekman, 2003). Indeed, Klingemann (1999) used confirmatory factor analysis to find institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy to load on the same dimension he terms performance of the regime. Thus, we expect high levels of satisfaction with democracy to positively correlate with high levels of trust in parties<sup>8</sup>.

## Results

Table 1 presents four hierarchical models, whereby the first two columns present the results for Israel and the last two present them for Belgium. As mentioned, we use both an indexed version

and a categorical version of the two main predictors: selectorate and centralization. The results we obtain support the hypothesis that using inclusive selectorate positively relates to citizens trust levels in parties: citizens who vote for parties that employ primaries tend to trust them more. The positive effect of democratic selections' procedural fairness, therefore, outweighs intra-party conflict's negative effect. Intra-party divisions play, though, an important role in explaining the findings that voters who vote for parties that employ decentralized processes, tend to exhibit lower level of trust towards parties.

With regards to selectorate's effect on respondent's partisan trust levels we see in the second column of Table 1 that Israeli voters, who vote for parties that use primaries have higher trust levels by 0.123 (on a 4 point scale), than voters who vote for parties that select their lists via party leaders, all else held constant. Similarly, voters who support parties that use delegates exhibit trust levels that are higher by 0.181—a 1/5 standard deviation—than those who support parties that select in an exclusive manner. Both results are statistically significant at a conventional level. The results for the Belgian case are comparable. Voters who vote for parties that use delegates exhibit higher trust levels by 0.340 (on a 5 point scale), which are about 0.4 standard deviations. Similarly, citizens who support parties that use primaries trust them more by a magnitude of 0.354 compared to citizens who support parties that select via leaders. Once again, these results are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

< Table 1 about here >

Theoretically we proposed two opposing explanatory mechanisms that connect parties' selectorates to citizens' trust—procedural fairness and intra-party conflict. We allowed the data to determine which mechanism is at work. The analysis clearly supports H1a, revealing that voters who support parties that use primaries have higher levels of partisan trust. Therefore we

conclude that either procedural fairness is the mechanism at work, or at a minimum its effect is stronger so it outweighs the negative effect of intra-party conflict.

Despite the correlation found in the table between more inclusive selectorates and trust levels, we may still wonder whether a simultaneity effect is at work: could it be that parties with voters that have high trust levels delegate decision making powers to a wider selectorate (and not vice versa)? Accounting for the issue of timing is, therefore, important. However, since most parties in our datasets do not alter their selection processes from one election cycle to the next, we cannot use panel data to account for the timing in a systematic manner. Nonetheless we use anecdotic evidence from parties that altered their selections over the years to provide support for our argument, that it is the increase in the scope of the selectorate that led to higher trust levels, and not the other way around.

In Israel, the Likud party selected its candidates for the 2006-2009 session via party's delegates, whereas prior to the 2009 elections, Likud used primaries. According to expectations, the average trust levels of Likud supporters was 1.97 in 2006, and rose to 2.14 in 2009 after the party expanded its selectorate. Conversely, when Likud decided after the 1996 elections to abandon the primaries and select in a more exclusive manner, Minister Michael Eitan from the Likud party said to Haaretz newspaper that Netanyahu should not cancel the primaries as "it will be a no-confidence in democracy, and Likud's chairperson cannot express no-confidence in democracy" (Verter, 1997). We unfortunately do not have public opinion data from that time period.

Similarly, during 2015 the Likud contemplated replacing again its primary system. However, a group of Likud Knesset Members objected to the move, arguing that selection via primaries is a democratic act, which Likud should be proud of: "we cannot ignore the



public damage that Likud might suffer from such a move...A decision to transform the selection process into a "closed club" business conveys the opposite message, saying that the party is caving in to an old, non-transparent and undemocratic selection" (Lev, 2015). Trust levels of Kadima's supporters further support our argument: Kadima selected its candidates for the 2006 Knesset via the most restrictive manner, but adopted primaries prior to the 2009 election. Kadima's voters' trust level rose accordingly from an average of 1.92 in 2006 to 2.07 in 2009.

Belgian parties that altered their selection also support our conclusions. Indeed in 1993, the Flemish Liberal Party adopted a new name and democratized its internal decision-making procedures, improving the party's image and increasing its popular support according to the polls (Verleden, 2013). This positive effect of democratizing intra-party procedures did not go unnoticed: the Flemish Christian Democratic Party followed the example of the Liberal counterparts and democratized their candidate selections (Verleden, 2013). And indeed while the CVP selected prior the 1995 elections via party delegates<sup>9</sup> and its supporters' average trust levels was 2.49, prior to the 1999 elections it selected via a more inclusive manner<sup>10</sup> and ' trust levels rose to a mean of 2.65. Likewise, when the Francophone Liberal Party (PRL) expanded its selection from an exclusive selection in 1995 to a system, in which member delegates ratify the resulting lists of candidates in 1999, its supporters' trust level increased from 2.01 in 1995 to 2.56 in 1999.

These anecdotes refute the argument that parties with high levels of partisan trust delegate selection processes to a wider selectorate, and support H1a which asserts that the expansion of the selectorate increased supporters' trust levels.

The analysis 1 also supports H2. For both Israel and Belgium we find a negative effect of decentralization on partisan trust levels. In Israel, holding all else constant, voters who support

parties that use more decentralized processes have lower trust levels by a magnitude of 0.238 than voters who support parties with centralized candidate selection. This result is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. In the Belgian case, where we can use the treatment contrast, we clearly see that the negative effect of decentralization stems from citizens who support parties that used solely localized procedures: the coefficient of local selections is -0.246, and is significant at the 0.05 level.

Our analysis also reveals that respondents who support governmental parties exhibit higher trust levels compared to respondents who support opposition parties. In three of the four models, the coalition variable's coefficient is positive and statistically significant at least at the 0.1 level.

As many scholars argue, the effect of demographic predictors on trust levels is limited, as the more important determinants of partisan trust relate to citizens' performance evaluations. Indeed, controlling for all other variables, and especially the satisfaction with democracy variable—our proxy for performance evaluation—we find no demographic variable with a consistent significant effect across all models.

While the effect of the demographic covariates is weak and inconclusive, the impact of satisfaction with democracy—our proxy for citizens' performance evaluation—is strong and steady. Higher levels of satisfaction with democracy are positively correlated with high levels of partisan trust. In Israel, a one unit increase in respondent's satisfaction levels increases his/her trust in parties by a magnitude of 0.169. Indeed movement on the full range of satisfaction with democracy, from respondents who are at not at all satisfied with democracy to those who are very satisfied, increases partisan trust by a magnitude of about 0.7. Belgium presents a similar picture. A one unit increase in satisfaction with democracy is associated with an increase of 0.426 units in the 5 point trust in parties scale. This means that movement on the full range of

satisfaction with democracy is associated with an increase of almost two units (out of a possible five) in trust for parties.

## **Conclusion**

Ample scholarly work has been devoted to identifying the trends in citizens' trust in political parties and the reasons for its apparent decline. Scholars often look at macro—country level—factors and individual-level determinants of partisan trust, debating whether and to what extent demographic characteristics affect citizens' trust in parties. While some found support for these measures, others argued that it is the respondent's evaluations of political and economic performance that mainly shape their trust towards political institutions. In this paper we add to our scholarly understanding about trust in parties by focusing attention on the meso—party level. We specifically examine whether and how the way parties select their candidates affects citizens' trust levels.

Parties themselves, as part of their struggle to revamp their glory days of strong partisan attachments and support, adopted democratic candidate selection processes. This was done in an effort to facilitate greater citizen's involvement in and mobilization to the democratic process, hoping it will increase citizen's efficacy and sense of belonging, and restore their trust in political parties, as they will perceive intra-party decision making processes to be more open, transparent and reliable. To what extent, then, do selection processes affect citizens' trust in parties? To what degree might selection procedures indeed be considered a tool parties can utilize to reestablish the electorate's confidence in them?

We theorized about the effect of candidate selections on partisan trust, while distinguishing between selections' centralization levels and the scope of the selectorate. The theoretical mechanism that links centralization levels to trust—intra-party conflict—pointed to a negative relationship between decentralized selection processes and citizens' trust. To mimic the division

in the literature about selection processes' consequences we present two theoretical mechanisms that relate the scope of the selectorate to trust in parties. Procedural fairness links democratized selections to high levels of trust. As citizens view democratic selection processes as more transparent and fair, their confidence in the selection process is projected to the party as a whole. The second mechanism—intra party conflict—explains why democratic selection processes might negatively affect citizens' partisan trust. The increased size of the selectorate incentivizes candidates to compete against one another in a personalized campaign frequently besmirching and discrediting their opponents even at the expense of the collective party's reputation. Thus, democratic selectorates are associated with more intensified intra-party conflict, which should derive downwards citizens' trust in political parties. Since both explanations are plausible, we let the data determine between these two explanatory mechanisms.

We test the hypotheses using individual and party level data from Israel and Belgium, two countries **which use PR systems in a highly fractionalized party system and** which present a great deal of variation in their parties' selection processes. Moreover, in both countries debate over selection methods revolved partially around arguments about partisan trust. The analysis supports a positive relationship between selectorate and trust levels, and a negative relationship between decentralized selection and trust levels.

**While the literature is divided concerning selection processes' consequences in general, and their effect on citizens' opinions in particular, our analysis provides clear findings in this regard: we find that inclusive selectorates increase partisan trust levels. From a theoretical perspective these results suggest that the positive impact of democratic selections' procedural fairness outweighs intra-party conflicts' negative effect. Our results, thus, seem to extend Scarrow's argument that some procedures of intra-party democracy "are better suited to some circumstances than to others" (Scarrow, 2005, 3). Our analysis, in conjuncture with the broader literature on intra-party democracy**

**suggests that while some consequences of intra-party democracy are negative others are positive, benefiting citizens, parties and democracy. Our study demonstrates the latter, as it shows how democratized intra-party candidate selections enhance citizen's trust in parties. Consequently, these results challenge Katz' argument that partisan organizational re-structuring should not affect declining party membership and citizens' satisfaction with party politics (Katz, 2013).**

The analysis presented above is cross-sectional, and does not directly test the mechanisms through which selectorate and centralization affect trust in parties. Future research will have to directly examine, possibly through experimental manipulation, whether and to what degree respondents perceive democratic selection procedures to be fairer and more transparent compared to exclusive selections, and whether this perceived procedural fairness translates to greater trust levels. A carefully designed lab experiment might enable us to also ascertain how voters weigh the two competing mechanisms of procedural fairness and intra-party conflict as they form evaluations about parties. **Furthermore, future research will have to ascertain whether our findings hold in other settings (like PR with non-fractionalized party system).**

**Moreover, to date, to the best of our knowledge no cross-national survey and almost no country-specific survey asked respondents directly about their opinions regarding candidate selection processes. In fact the only survey we know that asked the general public is the Israeli National Election Study from 1996<sup>11</sup>. Other surveys asked party members/activists of specific parties about their opinion on democratic selection processes, for example Bernardi *et al*, (2016), who study the Italian Democratic Party or Sandri and Amjahad (2015) who study the Belgian Socialist Party. It would be of great importance to systematically study citizen's views about intra-party selection processes so that we can progress our understanding about the potential multifaceted ability of primaries to amend and overcome parties' decline.**

*Our analysis is one of the first attempts that focuses on party level characteristics—namely intra-party candidate selection processes—and examines how they affect citizens' trust levels in parties. Future research will have to ascertain the causal mechanism and generalizability of our findings. Yet, our results suggest that by adopting inclusive candidate selection processes parties could perform the role of democratic attitude-promoters.*

Word Count: 8363 words.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> While the effect of selectorate on trust level is presented (and tested empirically) as a meso-level predictor, one can hypothesize that selectorate effect on trust levels will differ across individual respondents. As individual voters are the ones that react to the differing stimuli from the selection procedures, their individual characteristics might determine whether they respond to democratization of selection process positively (according to H1a), or negatively (according to H1b). This rationale is similar to the one presented by Van der Brug (2004) who argued that the degree to which issue ownership explains individual voters' electoral choices is dependent on ideology. Similarly, Vegetti (2014) demonstrate how partisanship affects the manner by which voters process information about parties, such that partisans are more likely to regard their preferred party as the most competent and the closest to them ideologically. These findings are especially important in light of our research design, whereby we nest voters within parties based on their support in the party. Given this rationale and our research design, voters may react positively to democratization, in light of their partisan support in the party. However, if Vegetti's rationale was at work, we should have seen no effect for democratization of the selectorate, as respondents were nested within the parties they supported irrespective of whether that party used primaries or a single leader to select its candidates. Nonetheless, given Vegetti's rationale it might be that if voters were asked to record their trust level toward each and every party in the system, our results might have been different. Unfortunately, neither the Israeli nor the Belgian surveys provide us with such detailed account of voters' trust levels towards all parties.

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<sup>2</sup> The legislative sessions for each country were chosen based on data availability of both, selection processes and survey data.

<sup>3</sup> Note that two of the surveys (2003 and 2009) were conducted shortly after the elections took place. The 2006 survey, on the other hand, was in the field prior to the elections. Ideally we would have like to have an identical partisan vote question for all legislative terms. Moreover, the ideal type of a nesting question would have asked respondents in a post-election survey which party did they vote for in the elections, or in a pre-election survey it would have asked them if the elections were held today which party would they vote for. Indeed, the 2006 question falls squarely into this ideal type, but the 2003 and 2009 questions do not. Unfortunately the surveys contained no other information we could use to overcome this pitfall.

<sup>4</sup> **The response rate for the European Social Survey for 2008 stood at 58.9% and for 2010 stood at 53.4%. For the 1995, 1999 and 2003 elections, data from the Belgian General Election Study were used. This survey is a combination of panel data and random cross-sectional data on new respondents. This group of new respondents was added to include first time voters and to compensate for non-responses in the panel group. In 1995, the response rate was 65.4% for Flemishes and 51.3% for francophones. In 1999, these percentages were respectively 63.7% and 36.4%. Finally, in 2003, the reported response rates for both groups was 64.4% and 64.5%. The Israeli IDI surveys, do not specify, unfortunately, any information concerning response rates.**

<sup>5</sup> Since the outcome variable is ordinal we also estimated a two-level ordered logit hierarchical model, for each country (see the on-line appendix). Substantive results are similar to the ones presented in the paper, especially concerning the effect of selection processes, and we therefore chose to present the more easily interpretable results.

<sup>6</sup> See on-line appendix for details.

<sup>7</sup> In Israel we could not include treatment contrast for both selectorate and centralization, as this led to perfect multicollinearity. Therefore, we only include contrast for the selectorate variable.

<sup>8</sup> See: descriptive statistics in the on-line appendix.

<sup>9</sup> The initiative to draft a model list was assigned to the bureau of the district party. Afterwards the national party board had the possibility to make a number of modifications to this list. Finally the assemblies of member delegates at the district level were expected to approve the model lists.

<sup>10</sup> The initiative was still taken at the district level, where the majority of the district parties created an informal and highly exclusive list formation committee to coordinate the process. The first draft of the candidate list needed to be ratified by the bureau of the district party. Afterwards it was passed to the national level where the general

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assembly ratified the lists of all of the districts. In the final step, all members had the possibility to ratify or reject the proposed list through member polls at the district level.

<sup>11</sup> Regrettably, the 1996 INES did not ask respondents the battery of questions about trust in institutions. We therefore, cannot directly ascertain the relationship between perceptions about primaries and citizens' trust in parties.

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Table 1: Selection Effect on Trust in Parties: Israel and Belgium

| Parameter                      | Israel<br>index<br>$\beta$ (P-value) | Israel<br>treatment<br>contrast<br>$\beta$ (P-value) | Belgium<br>Index<br>$\beta$ (P-value) | Belgium<br>treatment<br>contrast<br>$\beta$ (P-value) |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Fixed Effects</i>           |                                      |  |                                       |   |
| Intercept                      | <b>1.757 (&lt;0.001)</b>             | <b>1.757(&lt;0.001)</b>                              | <b>2.410 (&lt;0.001)</b>              | <b>2.318 (&lt;0.001)</b>                              |
| Selectorate                    | <b>0.181 (0.003)</b>                 |  | <b>0.145 (0.049)</b>                  |   |
| Decentralization               | <b>-0.238 (0.008)</b>                |  | <b>-0.133 (0.023)</b>                 |   |
| Delegates                      |                                      | <b>0.181 (0.003)</b>                                 |                                       | <b>0.340 (0.008)</b>                                  |
| Primaries                      |                                      | <b>0.123 (0.019)</b>                                 |                                       | <b>0.354 (0.004)</b>                                  |
| National+Local                 |                                      |  |                                       | -0.016 (0.848)  |
| Local                          |                                      |  |                                       | <b>-0.246 (0.021)</b>                                 |
| Party Ideology                 | 0.023 (0.266)                        | 0.023 (0.266)  | 0.036 (0.429)                         | -0.015(0.737)   |
| Coalition                      | <b>0.168 (&lt;0.001)</b>             | <b>0.168 (&lt;0.001)</b>                             | <b>0.165 (0.100)</b>                  | 0.107 (0.286)   |
| Satisfaction with<br>democracy | <b>0.169 (&lt;0.001)</b>             | <b>0.169 (&lt;0.001)</b>                             | <b>0.426 (&lt;0.001)</b>              | <b>0.426 (&lt;0.001)</b>                              |
| Education                      | <b>-0.010 (0.059)</b>                | <b>-0.010 (0.059)</b>                                | <b>0.024 (0.050)</b>                  | <b>0.025 (&lt;0.045)</b>                              |
| Income                         | -0.016 (0.283)                       | -0.016 (0.283)                                       | <b>0.017 (0.002)</b>                  | <b>0.017 (0.002)</b>                                  |
| Age                            | <b>-0.012 (0.016)</b>                | <b>-0.012 (0.016)</b>                                | -0.005 (0.325)                        | -0.005 (0.311)  |
| Age2                           | <b>0.000 (0.049)</b>                 | <b>0.000 (0.049)</b>                                 | 0.000 (0.374)                         | 0.000 (0.359)   |
| Gender                         | -0.025 (0.469)                       | -0.025 (0.469)                                       | -0.001 (0.954)                        | -0.001 (0.975)  |
| <i>Variance Components</i>     |                                      |  |                                       |   |
| Intercept                      | 0.056 (0.284)                        | 0.056 (0.284)  | <b>0.220 (&lt;0.001)</b>              | <b>0.212 (&lt;0.001)</b>                              |
| Residual                       | 0.834                                | 0.834  | 0.835                                 | 0.835   |
| <i>N (level 1):</i>            | 2627                                 | 2627   | 9215                                  | 9215  |
| <i>N (level 2):</i>            | 32                                   | 32   | 40                                    | 40  |